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ABSTRACT

This position paper on the articulation of foreign language programs considers many of the problems caused by the transfer of students from junior and community colleges to four-year institutions. The establishment of uniform assessment procedures of foreign language levels, procedures for placement of college freshmen, and the development of standardized testing practices are viewed as goals of an articulated state-wide language program. Discussion of the Modern language Association and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages testing programs stresses the ability to communicate in the target language. Specific criteria for testing programs focus on the establishment of levels; proposed areas of competence to be measured, definition of norms, and the application of these results to articulation measures are examined. Recommendations to language teachers in the State of Iowa are included. (RL)

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REPORT ON ARTICULATION

I. Establishment of the Articulation Committee:

The State Articulation Committee on foreign languages was formed in response to a recommendation from the State Department of Public Instruction in September, 1969. This committee is a part of a larger State Articulation Committee previously recommended to cope with problems of articulation, in each of the basic disciplines, between two-year and four-year institutions. After the original membership of the foreign language committee composed of professors from two-year and four-year colleges and universities, had begun their deliberations, it was decided to invite representatives of the high schools to participate also, since so many of them today teach long foreign language sequences which need to be taken into consideration in the articulation process.

II. Necessity for Articulation in Foreign Languages:

Articulation in our field is a very grave problem. Placement has been something of a nightmare to every college and university language department for years. Countless hours of faculty and administrative time have been spent in attempts to devise successful procedures for correct assignment of incoming students from high schools, and of transfer students from other colleges and universities, students who differ greatly in background, in training, and in interest.

The two-year college faculty is in an especially difficult position. Departments in degree-granting colleges and universities are to a large degree masters of their own house; they have been able to set their own goals and develop a more or less cohesive program to meet the desired pattern, and the pressure generated by this pattern has

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hammer the transfer student into their mold. But the major purpose of the two-year college is to help the student meet language requirements for the four-year programs of other institutions. It is extremely difficult to do this successfully when each four-year program is different. These programs differ not only in specific requirements but also in the approach to language learning. Often, to train a student to meet successfully the requirements of one university means to penalize him if he enters another. Frequently there are basic differences from one language to another even within the departments of one university.

High school teachers face some of the same problems as they prepare students for two-year and four-year colleges. Of course, the student who enters the university as a junior is penalized much more severly if he cannot meet the requirements at that level, and especially is this true if he is thinking of a major or minor in a foreign language.

Yet even the problem of the transfer student, severe as it is, did not seem to the committee to be the crux of the problem. It seemed rather only part of it, one result of the chaotic and demoralized condition of foreign language education throughout the state, and, to some degree, the nation.

Among the problems, and contributing to them, is the fact that there has been no one in the state to speak for foreign languages. Instead of one voice, the only sound reaching the ears of those few who might care to listen has been a chorus of faint voices, one contradicting the other, the meaning lost in the cacophony.

III. Goals:

After thus defining the problem of articulation, the committee set up the following goals:

A. To work toward establishment of a uniform assessment of foreign language achievement levels.

B. To work toward establishment of a uniform placement of first-year college students in foreign language courses according to appropriate assessment of previous foreign language study.

C. To work toward a uniform system of placement of college transfer students.

D. To promote acceptance of a standardized testing program in Iowa's schools and colleges to achieve goals A, B, and C above.

IV. The Proposed Testing Program:

A. General precepts

1. Goals for testing basic skills should be in accordance with guidelines set up by the Modern Language Association and AACTFL (American Association of Teachers of Foreign Languages).

2. The battery of tests to be selected or prepared should emphasize, to a greater degree than has been done in any testing program which we have seen or concerning which we have heard, the ability to communicate in the target language. This communication would include:

a. The ability to understand the language as spoken by a native speaker.

b. The ability to read for understanding rather than for translation.

c. The ability to express one's thoughts in oral or written form so that they would be comprehensible to a native speaker.

d. In the active skills, the ability to express oneself correctly should be an important consideration but should not take precedence over the ability to communicate.

B. Specific criteria for testing program:

1. Establishment of levels: The committeee recommends the establishment of levels of competence, corresponding in general terms to demonstrated achievement levels of college and university students in their first two year's work. Speaking and listening skills should be emphasized on the first levels. All four skills should receive approximately equal emphasis on subsequent levels.

2. Proposed areas to be measured:

a. Reading: To consist of questions written in the target language with multiple choice answers also in the target language.

b. Aural comprehension: To consist of short statements recorded by a native speaker with multiple choice answers printed on an answer sheet.

c. Composition: The committee suggests that an important part of the examination be composed of a combination of visual cues combined with key words in the target language. It was felt that this type of examination could be used to measure accurately the ability of the student to communicate in writing.

d. Speaking: The committee realizes that this is the most difficult skill to measure but does not think that it should, for this reason, be omitted. We suggest that a procedure be used similar to that suggested for written composition, with the student recording his answers rather than writing them down.

3. Establishing norms: State norms should be established by administering the examination to college and university students enrolled in the first two years of language study at all Iowa institutions, public and private, two-year and four-year, willing to participate.

4. Application of results:

a. University students (diagnostic):

1) Continuing students: Each college and university would be able to determine the standing of its students, both individually and collectively, by means of this examination.

2) Transfer students: Transfer students wishing or required to continue studey in a foreign language might be placed more accurately if they had been tested in this way.

b. High school graduates: The committee believes that an important application of this testing program would involve the high school student planning to enter a college or university in Iowa. For this reason, it recommends that an attempt be made to set up testing centers, perhaps consisting of all the colleges and universities wishing to participate in this cooperative testing program.

1) We suggest that high school students, at the end of their senior year, be given the opportunity to take this examination and that their score on the examination be recorded and forwarded to the college or university at which they enroll.

2) In addition to using the results for placement of in-coming high school students, the committee stronly recommends, to each Iowa college and university, that it grant foreign language credit (that is to say, college or university credits) according to their level of achievement.

V. The Articulation Committee makes the following recommendations to the assembled language teachers of the State of Iowa:

A. That they endorse this report and it recommendations.

B. That they support the committee as their spokesman during next academic year to express their legitimate needs and aspirations, and to defend the proper place of foreign languages in the state system of education before such organizations and persons as the Department of Public Instruction, the Board of Regents, guidance counselors, and registrars and curriculum committees of all Iowa colleges and univeristies.

VI. Finally, the committee wishes to emphasize that, while it seems that it would be very much in our interest to coordinate, to a much greater degree than at present, the foreign language programs in the state, it in no way wishes to impose any standard pattern in textbooks or methodology on any segment of the language teachers of Iowa. On the contrary, we believe that it is our task to bring into some kind of harmony-the varying and frequently conflictive theories and practices of a vast variety of independent educational institutions without in any way dampening the initiative and the spirit of change and revolution so vital to an under-developed and undersupported field such as ours. We suggest that a primary responsibility for all of us is a refusal to accept the status quo, a refusal to accept entirely the precepts of any methodology, system or theory yet devised and a willingness to seek out whatever techniques may work most efficiently in any given set of circumstances in order best to approach the goals stated by our own professional associations.